

Multi-catch cage use

A guide to successful good practice for controlling corvids

Although territorial pairs of crows and magpies are usually the most serious nest predators, flock-living corvids can also do serious damage. In many cases the sheer weight of numbers means that they come across nests, even if by accident, at far too great a rate. This applies especially if you have large numbers of juvenile crows living nearby, perhaps obtaining their main living on a rubbish tip or outdoor pig unit.

Similar problems apply with moorland situations. Here, if there are no trees, crows will breed on the edges of the moor, defending their territories here, but foraging out onto the moor for grouse nests and other foods. Similar problems can occur with rooks and jackdaws. Wherever possible it pays to get permission from neighbours to trap the boundaries in these situations.

Remember that crow cages must only be operated under a General Licence (issued annually by Natural England and Natural Resources Wales) by authorised persons who understand and comply with its conditions (see legal section at rear of leaflet for more details of the licences). An authorised person means the owner or

occupier, or any person authorised by the owner or occupier, of the land on which trapping is taking place. Individuals are not personally required to be in possession of a licence. The licence can only be relied on in circumstances where the authorised person has satisfied himself that appropriate non-lethal methods of control such as scaring or bird proofing are either ineffective or impracticable.

In most cases Larsen traps are of limited use on open moorland. Even if corvids are naïve enough to go in and join the decoy when attracted only by the need for company, the rate of catch at one or two birds at a time is too slow to be really effective. On the other hand, the urge to join a feeding flock is great. So a larger cage, with several decoys already in it, is likely to work well. This applies especially in the late winter period, when many keepers like to make a start on their crow control.

The exact design of these multi-catch cages is much less critical than with Larsens, and General Licences do not specify what size a multi-catch cage should be. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 states that if any person keeps or confines

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The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

For over 80 years our scientists have been researching why species like the grey partridge, water vole, corn bunting and black grouse have declined. We are continually developing practical measures to reverse these declines.

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We are an independent charity reliant on voluntary donations and the support of people who care about the survival of our natural heritage.



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any bird in a cage which is not sufficient in height, length or breadth to permit the bird(s) to stretch its wings freely, he shall be guilty of an offence and be liable to prosecution.

Designs and dimensions of traps are numerous. The size of the trap is relatively unimportant when compared to its siting, the latter being crucial to catching success.

Roof funnels

This type of trap is particularly popular on the hill for crow control. It can be made in sections, or permanently sited in places that are known to prove successful from year to year. The trap itself is usually about 3m square and 1.8m high, with a door in one side for access. It has a single roof-funnel entrance which is 120cm square at the top, and framed with wood. This tapers to a round hole at the bottom, 60cm in diameter; and only about 22cm from the ground (see right). The idea is that the crow folds its wings to drop unrestricted down the funnel, but that if it spreads its wings to fly out again it does not have room even if standing exactly in the centre of the circle. Hence the height and diameter of the bottom of the funnel are more critical than the size at the top.

Building such traps around a dead sapling or placing a perch which rises above the trap and leads a bird part way down the funnel are popular schemes which seem to help. The trap is normally baited (with rabbits or other carrion) and left to work during the breeding season. The use of fallen farm stock as bait or food, such as dead lambs, is illegal under EU and UK Animal By-Products Regulations. When cage traps are active, they must be inspected by the authorised person at least once every day at intervals

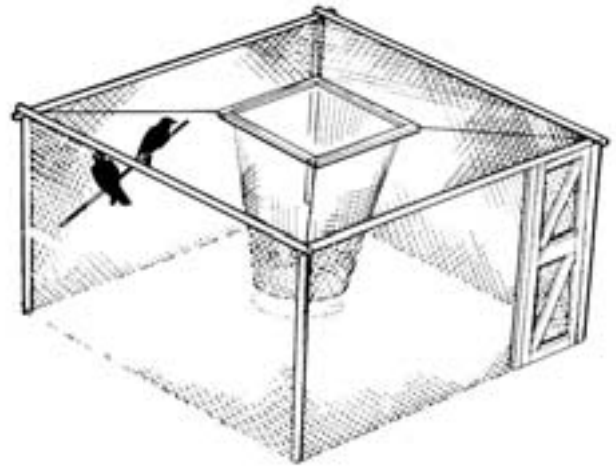
We recommend you do not site a cage near to a main roost or near to a used public access route. Not only might users of the route see and possibly disrupt your trapping, but non-captive crows may become shy of the location when disturbed by people. Select a quiet location site on a known flight line eg. along a lakeside, beside a stream or even in open moorland where

of no more than 24 hours. Such an inspection must be sufficient to determine whether there are any live or dead birds in the trap. Any dead or sickly decoy birds must be immediately removed from the trap. Do not therefore rely on a binocular check. Remember that if using rabbit or other carrion as food for decoys, a multi-catch cage trap may attract and catch non-target species such as buzzards. Birds other than those permitted for capture under licence must be released unharmed immediately on being found. It is a legal condition under General Licences that when not in use, multi-catch crow cages must be rendered incapable of use. Access doors of multi-catch cage traps must be removed from the site or securely padlocked open so that no bird can be confined.

The presence of a couple of live decoys (see legal section at rear of leaflet for legitimate decoy species) can enhance catches significantly and their care must

crows have good all-round vision.

Three basic types of multi-catch cages have come to the fore. The roof funnel, the ground funnel and the ladder letterbox. In all cases they should be covered with 35mm wire mesh, since smaller sizes trap songbirds and anything larger could allow jackdaws or magpies to escape.



Roof funnel

comply to all relevant animal welfare legislation at all times, including the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Decoy birds must be provided with adequate food, water, appropriate shelter and a suitable perch that does not cause discomfort to the birds' feet. Decoy birds must also have adequate protection from the prevailing wind and rain. Appropriate shelter should also help during periods of hot sun. In the uplands it is usually essential to stock-fence cages to prevent damage.

Ground level funnels

This type of trap is usually made in sectional form for use on low-ground. The standard, but not critical, size is a 1.8m cube. A ground level funnel similar to that on a pheasant catcher is put in three sides with a door in the fourth. The funnels should be about 50cm wide by 50cm high

on the outside, tapering to 10cm wide by 12cm high at the inner end, with a length of about 60cm (see page 3). Some keepers dislike this type of trap since it occasionally catches the odd gamebird.

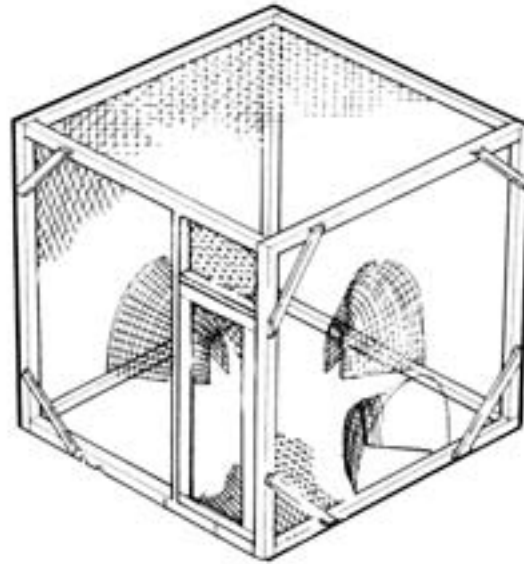
The trap can be run in one of two ways. Either by introducing food, water,

perches, shelter and several decoys as soon as it is set, or by pre-baiting. In the latter method no decoy is used and the trap is simply set up in an area where there are flock living corvids, with the roof off and the door removed from the site or opened and secured by a padlock. Bait is

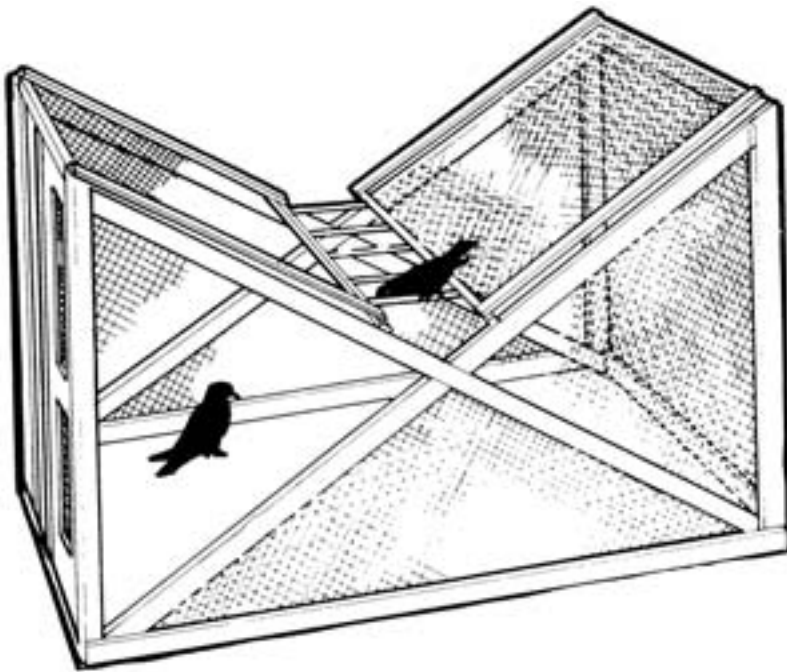
then scattered both around and within the trap for several days until the corvids are coming with confidence. White sliced bread is often as good a bait as any. It is palatable and visible, and if the wrappers are left in the trap the area has an uncanny resemblance to a picnic site. Once the bait is disappearing regularly, replace the door and fit the roof (a small piece of rearing-pen netting will do) and leave the trap for a full day. Daily catches in excess of 100 birds, particularly of rooks and jackdaws, are quite commonplace.

Sometimes it pays to leave a few birds as decoys for a second day but in most cases it is better to return to pre-baiting for another week. Once catches fall off, it usually pays to move the trap to a new site.

Ground level funnel



Ladder letterbox traps



This type of cage can be built to the same dimensions as the ground level or roof funnel types. It has no particular advantage, except that there is no risk of catching gamebirds. Its main disadvantage is when using it to trap jackdaws, which seem to have an uncanny ability to escape through roof entrances, although this design reduces that to a minimum. As will be seen from the diagram (left), the roof slopes from two sides to a central slot which has rungs across it like a ladder. The best size of slot is 14cm wide, with the rungs placed 9cm apart except for the centre which is 14cm square. The 30cm or so at each end is blocked off with netting to prevent jackdaws from climbing up the sides and escaping.

Destroying corvid nests

The General Licences permit the destruction of eggs and nests as part of a corvid control programme. Many keepers like to push out old corvid nests when drey poking for grey squirrels in early spring. This is certainly helpful in allowing the keeper to easily spot any new nests being built on his beat. Care must be taken,

however, as it is an offence to damage the nests of birds of prey* when they are in use. Sitting corvids often stay on the nest when approached, and it is sometimes possible to shoot them.

**It is an offence to disturb the nest of a Schedule 1 bird at any time.*



The legal situation

The use of multi-catch cages to control corvids is regulated by General Licences issued under section 16 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Separate licences are issued annually by Natural England (NE) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW). Individual operators do not need to apply for these licences nor have them in their possession.

These licences restrict the use of multi-catch cage traps to 'authorised persons' (effectively landowners, occupiers or persons with their permission) who understand and comply with their conditions.

These licences can only be relied upon in circumstances where the authorised person has satisfied himself that appropriate non-lethal methods of control such as scaring or bird proofing are either ineffective or impracticable. No person convicted of wildlife crime on or after 1 January 2009 may use these licences unless admonished or fully discharged by a court order. The licences also impose a series of licence conditions on the user; these mainly

relate to the welfare of decoy birds. If you follow the guidance given in this guide you should be well within the law, but the following points should be emphasised:

1. Only operate multi-catch cage traps under the terms and conditions of each licence for the purposes specified.
2. Check your traps at least once every day at intervals of no more than 24 hours, except in the case where unexpected severe weather prohibits. An inspection must be sufficient to determine whether there are any live or dead birds in the trap; any dead or sickly decoy birds must be immediately removed from the trap.
3. Decoy birds must be provided with adequate food, water and shelter and a suitable perch that does not cause discomfort to the birds' feet. Decoy birds should also have protection from the prevailing wind and rain. These provisions must be made available at all times to be compliant with all relevant animal welfare legislation, including the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

4. Only the following corvid species may be confined as decoys in multi-catch cages: carrion crow, jackdaw, rook, magpie and jay. **Never use species other than permitted corvids as decoys.**
5. The General Licences name the birds which may be taken or killed by certain listed methods. Birds other than these listed species must be released unharmed immediately on being found in a cage trap.
6. When any cage trap is not in use it must be rendered incapable of use. Access doors must be removed from the site or securely padlocked open so that no bird can be confined.

It is important to remember that General Licences are issued for only a year at a time, and that they can be amended. It is up to the operator to be aware of the current licence conditions, and that they are adhered to. The current General Licences can be viewed and downloaded from the NE and NRW websites.

The legal situation in Scotland is rather different so please see the Scottish version of this leaflet.

Wing clipping

Under section 5 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is illegal to use a decoy which is tethered, or which is blind, maimed or injured. A well publicised court case addressed the issue of whether a wing-clipped decoy (ie. feather clipped) was 'maimed' and therefore illegal. Although the case concluded that wing clipping was not maiming, we are against this practice. It does not enhance the welfare of the decoy and does nothing to improve the effectiveness of the trap. It also means that if someone liberates your decoy(s) there is a high risk that it will suffer a slow death by starvation.

Please remember to take note of the welfare points. Look after your decoy birds, and keep your traps clean. When not in use, remove any old food to minimise the risk of animals being drawn to the cage and being injured. Strict adherence to these guidelines

Humane dispatch

When dispatching birds in a multi-catch cage, the General Licences demand that all reasonable precautions are taken to ensure that any killing of birds must be carried out humanely as soon as reasonably practicable after discovery. Humanely is defined in each licence as taking all reasonable precautions to ensure that any killing of birds is carried out by a single, swift action. To ensure effective dispatch, we recommend that each individual bird is first caught by hand.

Corvids and especially crows have a strong head and can peck and break your skin. We therefore recommend that you

wear gardening or similar protective gloves.

Catch each individual bird by hand (or using a small hand net if you prefer). Having taken a firm hold across the bird's body, rap its head hard against the nearest frame of the trap. This should kill it with a single blow, but always dislocate the neck straight away just in case the bird is only stunned. Please always take away the carcasses and dispose of them properly.

and licence conditions will not only ensure 'keepers are working within the law, it should also help the public accept multi-catch cages as a valuable and humane trapping technique. (Updated February 2014)

More information

The GWCT's Advisory Service can provide further advice on predation control, and on all aspects of game management. Please contact 01425 651013.